

Freedom and the Inner Dimension in Marcuse

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Abstract

For Marx, the necessity of freedom has ontological grounding. When our capacity to labour is alienated from us and applied to abstract ends, we are unfree. For Marcuse, repressive needs prevent the development of what he calls “inner freedom.” This is the capacity to think critically and act autonomously from repressive society, to have different needs and desires than those which are imposed. However, in *The Aesthetic Dimension*, Marcuse argues that experiencing art interrupts unreflective involvement in the world, infecting experience with awareness of an inner dimension that is suppressed and distorted by those appearances. In this capacity of art Marcuse sees the potential for the reinvigoration of inner freedom.

Keywords: Marx; Marcuse; freedom; art; alienation

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Chapter 1. Introduction

I began this project originally with the intention to write about what critical theory can tell us about ecological crises in what is being called by some ecologists the Anthropocene. “Anthropocene” designates our current geological era, in which any account of nature cannot exclude human activity. Of course, any account of nature in general should not exclude human beings, simply because we are nature, but the term is intended to designate that we have affect on every ecosystem and form of life on the planet.

As I pursued my topic I began to realize that it was a bit awkward and open ended. To be sure, I could study critiques of modernity, industrialization, and instrumental rationality and point to them as the culprits. However, what struck me as difficult about the topic is what I consider to be the near redundancy of such a study to our current predicament unless it has a foundation in praxis. In other words, the problem is not so much that we are destroying the planet and we only need to discover the ways in which we are doing so. That work has been done. The problem is that so far we have been unable to stop these practices.

Consequently, this paper is about human freedom and agency for Marx and Marcuse. The investigation centres around not only Marx’s industrial capitalism, but more so around Marcuse’s “advanced industrial technological society,”¹ which is not characterized by many of the tensions present in Marx’s capitalism, or the tensions are at least actively negated. Marcuse writes, “Under the conditions of a rising standard of living, non-conformity with the system itself appears to be socially useless, and the more so when it entails tangible economic and political disadvantages and threatens the smooth operation of the whole” (2).

¹ See *One-Dimensional Man*

If Marx's capitalism was characterized by definite tensions between capital and the alienated workers, then Marcuse's advanced industrial technological society is characterized by a neat synthesis between the majority of the population and the technological apparatus. This is due to a rising standard of living which obviates the use value [!] of anything but conformity. If the technological apparatus does not demand for the cost of our consumption slavish toil, if conformity becomes ever more comfortable, ever more rewarding, beyond any promised image of a liberated society, then surely individuals will find less reason to revolt.

Of course the absurdity of the situation is immediately apparent to us, as the society as a whole is characterized by destruction and suffering. Furthermore, Marcuse's prediction that world fascism has not yet been realized, delivered in 1964, seems to be coming true as we witness the atrocities in Israel and Ukraine and the allegiance of Canada with these fascist powers, not to mention the less obvious rise of fascist parties in Europe. The need to change the situation locally and globally becomes ever more pressing seemingly as each month goes by. A solution to these issues requires no less than a total reconfiguration of society, a realization which is actively militated against by society. For all these reasons I have decided to discuss human freedom in the context of civilization today.

The first paper, titled "Marx's Ontology of Freedom," seeks to demonstrate the ontological grounding of the necessity of freedom in Marx's work by exploring labour. Labour, for Marx, is the solely human capacity through which we transform the world according to reason. It is not labour as we think in the colloquial sense. However, capitalism appropriates labour, subjecting it to ends that are not our own, ends that are not self-determined. Rather, these ends are determined by what Marx calls "exchange value," which is essentially a determination that almost completely departs from the material, human realities of food, clothing, shelter, etc. In concluding, I show that exchange value, like all real abstractions, is inherently "one-sided." That is, these abstractions favour some interests to the exclusion of most. For example, Marx highlights the arbitrariness of the criminalization of the peasants' collection of dead wood simply because the trees from which the wood falls have been designated "private property." This abstract designation ignores the fact that peasants had customarily

collected dead wood, in order to survive the winter, long before private property was institutionalized and universalized as a form. These impositions are all, according to Marx's ontology, not just impositions on human needs and dignity, but on our human capability to appropriate and transform our material surroundings in a rational, self-determined way.

The second paper is titled "Repressive Needs and Inner Freedom in *One-Dimensional Man*." In it I show how, for Marcuse, needs that are imposed upon the majority of the population by the technological apparatus serve not only to keep people invested in the system, but to ensure that they are unable to comprehend its irrational character. For example, the need to constantly secure enough money to pay for housing is a false need. It is a need that arises not out of the concrete reality and its possibilities, but the socially necessity of maintaining the status quo. In terms of social wealth, there is by far enough to ensure that no one ever need worry about where they will live. False needs serve to keep people invested and dependent upon the status quo, and are therefore repressive. Furthermore, false needs inhibit the development of what Marcuse calls "inner freedom," or critical consciousness, because constant, necessary investment in the system precludes autonomy in action.

Lastly, my paper "Transcendence and Rebellious Subjectivity in *The Aesthetic Dimension*" outlines the possibility that Marcuse sees in art for reinvigorating a critical awareness of society. By virtue of what Marcuse calls the "aesthetic form" art mediates and transforms the world in such a way that its meaning is altered. The world through art is exposed as repressive, as we are pulled out of our immediate involvement with society in the constant pursuit of false needs, and exposed to that very inner dimension (or freedom) which Marcuse says is precluded by false needs. Marcuse sees the experience of art as the potential for the rebirth of the "rebellious subjectivity," meaning one who recognizes the repressive nature of society as it is and recognizes the need for liberation. In other words, art reveals the possibility of freedom itself.

The concern with art appears to need some justification. In Marcuse's work, the potentially liberating power of art really does represent the last shred of hope for humanity. It is not enough that we are politically conscious, for there is nothing about

political consciousness alone that will keep us from going to work, keep us from reproducing a destructive society. Rather, art alone has the power to radically transform our needs to the point of making living in this society unbearable, and it is only when life in this society becomes unbearable to individuals that they will be driven to change it.

Chapter 2. Marx's Ontology of Freedom

The possibility of freedom is always present in Marx's dialectical critique of capitalist society. It is, however, only present in its absence, as something to be realized by transcending capitalist society. The movement toward a post-capitalist society is to be understood as the realization of the material conditions of freedom. Marx, living on the cusp of the transition to industrial capitalism, sought to explain the tumultuous world around him with a materialist ontology, exemplified especially in his early writings before his turn to pragmatism, in which he develops a unique materialist philosophy which emphasizes not a mechanistic understanding of the social world, but one which places human agency in a central role in what Marx later called humanity's "metabolic interaction" with nature (Foster 52). While his work does focus on modern capitalist society, Marx avoids anthropocentrism, as he understands human beings not just in general terms of social relations within a wider "nature," but in terms of human beings and their productive capacities as a natural force.

This chapter will present the briefest sketch of Marx's ontology. The core of Marx's critique of bourgeois society contains an ontological grounding of the potential for human freedom rooted in a dialectical conception of nature and production. It is the interplay between the objective necessity of our nature and the subjective capacity of labour which is the motor force behind history. Furthermore, it will be shown that capitalism creates a real barrier to human freedom, in effect compromising our human essence. This will be accomplished through an exploration of the ideas of Marxist thinkers like Ian Angus, Paul Burkett, John Bellamy Foster and Andrew Feenberg, all of whom have written on Marx's ontology of labour, alongside a close reading of Marx's critique of the "one-sidedness" of private property legislation targeting wood collection.

2.1. Labour

The question we must first answer if we are concerning ourselves with freedom, or rather its absence in modern society, is, what is the nature of human freedom? And, to what extent is human freedom withheld from realization?

Ian Angus, in “Marx’s Ontology of Labour,” points out that the logic of capital and the critique of political economy must rest on an ontological analysis of nature (7, 8). This is because central to capital is the appropriation of labour, which is a natural process “independent of any social formation.” For Angus, any understanding of the historical development of accumulative appropriation must be rooted in the trans-historical essence of labour if it is to be fully understood. Labour is the process through which we as human beings fulfill our needs. These needs are themselves an aspect of human objective being. That is, I cannot choose when my stomach feels empty or when it rains and I must seek shelter. Through the process of objectively fulfilling these needs we create new objective circumstances and therefore new needs.

An immanent critique of appropriation of human labour (characterizing capitalism), demands consideration of the trans-historical aspects of human labour, which are beyond the social relations which constitute its immediate content. How is it that we, through labour, are capable of fulfilling our needs? Angus locates this capacity in terms of labour’s inherent ability to produce surplus, which is the trans-historical aspect of labour. Ultimately, to be able to get beyond the gratification of immediate needs one must be able to create more than is immediately necessary and to invest that surplus. The process of the accumulation and application of surplus is the basis of all societies, and the origins of history, as surplus is the basis of the creation of new material contingencies from which arise new needs (Angus 4, 5). In creating new material contingencies we also create new capacities which alter the horizon of possibilities.

This process is not a mechanistic one by which we are perpetually compelled to create only to be compelled to create again. However, before addressing the human, subjective component of human labour we must address the objective limits. The ability

to produce a surplus is not to be credited primarily as a human capacity. Rodents store food in their burrows in order to survive the winter. Rather, the subjective aspect of surplus production is secondary to nature's inherent capacity to produce abundance (Angus 6), which is then appropriated.

In the first part of his book, *Marx and Nature: A Red and Green Perspective*, Paul Burkett outlines Marx's ontological basis of human history as within the limits of nature. While Burkett identifies a humanism in Marx insofar as he sees Marx's ontology as locating in human beings a free, subjective capacity rather than a determined objective existence, he nonetheless asserts that Marx sees labour as a natural force (33). Human beings are ontologically distinct from, and yet arise out of, nature. In other words, while humans are unique, they do not exist outside the parameters of nature. Labour, insofar as it is compelled by need which arises out of objective existence, is a natural force.

Not only is labour contained within the parameters of the objective existence of human beings, but for labour to appropriate surplus there must be no natural barriers to this production (Burkett, 34). Therefore, labour may be understood as a dialectical struggle with nature, an interplay between subject and object, including the objective existence of the subject, in which both are mutually conditioned. While surplus is a natural potential, what is distinctly human is the capacity to apply reason to the appropriation of surplus. It is the very challenge of nature which demands the application of the distinctly human capacity of reason if we are to transcend certain objective modes of being (being in constant want of food, shelter, safety etc.).² It is reason which allows human beings to refrain from the satisfaction of immediate needs and not merely store but invest surplus into the creation of technology as a means to wrest from nature the material bases for the transcendence of constant want (Burkett, 2).³

² The transcendence of objective modes of being is a distinctly human capacity. The rodent which stores food in its burrow does not transcend want of food in order to posit a new mode of being in the world. Rather, it only achieves a brief overcoming of the possibility of its own negation: death from starvation due to a failure to procure surplus for the winter season. Only we are able to accumulate surplus and invest it in a way that opens up wholly new possibilities for being.

³ A perfect example here is agriculture – not only did people need to find themselves in an objective condition of surplus, but they had to acquire that surplus and invest it again in the soil in order to

We have identified human beings and beings of nature, and insofar as we are beings of nature we must contend not only with nature external to ourselves in the form of an objective world which affects us objectively, but with our own nature. In other words, the human subject is challenged with their real existence as an object in a world of objects. The process of what Marcuse calls the “struggle for existence” is subjectively enacted through labour, in which the subject creates new material circumstances according to reason.

We are already much closer to discovering the nature of human freedom. Already we have identified that there are two dialectically interrelated problems of human freedom. The first is that as we are bodies in a material world we are also objects, and insofar as we are objects there are things that can happen to us that are beyond our control. I cannot choose when it rains, when drought occurs, or when my stomach feels empty. Our objective being is a real barrier to freedom insofar as there is a struggle with nature which we are compelled to address on a daily basis – the transcendence of this struggle could be considered the project of civilization in general. On the other hand, we are subjects. That is, our unique human essence which distinguishes us from animals is that we have the capacity to apply reason to the world. I can build shelter, seek ground water and grow food in an effort to transcend particular objective circumstances, and thus create new objective possibilities which are again realized through my subjectivity. We are driven, as objects, to labour, but through labour we use our subjectivity in order to transcend objective barriers to freedom. Therefore, freedom is not the ability to do whatever one wants; to imagine such a possibility is to retreat into idealism. Rather, freedom is the ability to address real barriers to the transcendence of necessity, which themselves condition barriers to the subjective capacity to carry out rational alternatives.

2.2. Rationality and Labour

In the second chapter of *Lukacs, Marx and the Sources of Critical Theory*,

transcend the condition of always being in want of surplus. Thus the objective conditions of human existence were themselves conditioned, with the proper application of human subjective will, or agricultural practices, so as to constantly render a surplus in the form of crops.

Andrew Feenberg provides an outline of what he calls Marx's "meta-theory of political philosophy." Feenberg shows that Marx's earlier work is an attempt to resolve the antinomies of need and reason, and that, in so doing, Marx shows how reason, our human capacity, in fact arises from need, our material being (31, 33). What I mean by the antinomies of need and reason is the contradiction between necessity and reason. In other words, a society in which its members operate out of compulsion of necessity will not necessarily be a rational society.

By using Feuerbach to critique Hegel, Marx displaces the idealist conceptions of subject and object as thinking subject and thought object, and places them within a materialist ontology. For Marx, the subject is to be thought of as the human being in all of their sensuous existence, and the object is to be thought of as a concrete, material object (Feenberg, 45). While Hegel seeks to resolve the alienation of subject and object in terms of thought, Marx develops a philosophy of praxis through which he claims the antinomy of need and reason may be resolved. With Marx, the Absolute, in terms of a thinking and creating being, arises out of the contingencies of the material world as the human subject. The Absolute is but the abstracted form of human capacities. Marx succeeds in resolving the antimony of need and reason, as reason is now understood to be arising out of need itself; the thinking subject is now not just "mind" but mind and body, reacting rationally to conditions of necessity. However, the resolution of the *alienation* of need and reason is to be accomplished through a material revolution: the de-alienation of the products of labour.

The important point here is that in shifting the emphasis from the ideal realm to the material realm and showing that reason in fact arises out of the whole material existence of human beings in relation to the material world, Marx is asserting the ontological necessity of freedom. If reason arises out of the necessity of the human subject, then a reason which is channeled and controlled by alienated forces, by abstract labour, cannot realize its purpose (Feenberg, 56). Insofar as the reason for labour, which is oriented to the satisfaction of necessity, is not controlled by the human being from which this necessity arises, reason is alienated from need. Or, rather, the reason for labour ceases to originate in the being of the subject, and arises from the being of another subject. The abstract rationality which compels concrete activity must arise from

the rationality of necessity, as opposed to alien ends, in order to be rational at all. In this sense, any rationality which is imposed upon the subject is detrimental to human freedom.

John Bellamy Foster points out that inseparable from the development of Marx's philosophy of praxis is his earlier study in materialist philosophy, as embodied in *The Difference Between the Democritean and Epicurean Philosophy of Nature*, his doctoral dissertation.

Epicurus was a Greek materialist philosopher who differed from other materialist philosophers of his time on one key issue. Unlike thinkers like Democritus, who thought that human activity arose mechanistically out of the movement of atoms, Epicurus thought that, while the material world generally followed the laws of mechanistic causality, spontaneous action was indeed possible. This was articulated as a minor disagreement on the movement of atoms, but in his doctoral dissertation Marx shows that this disagreement has major consequences for an understanding of humans and society.

Because we are, according to Epicurus, material beings in a strictly material world our needs are materially determined. I cannot control when I am hungry, except through measured consumption of food or a dietary suppressant. But this is specifically the point: that we use reason in order to meet the demands of those needs. Insofar as we have the capacity to apply reason to material problems we are not rationally determined. The creation of culture and society, and the diversity of its forms, is a result of the application of reason to material problems.

Epicurus (and Marx) eschews religion precisely because it inhibits the individual's ability to apply their capacity for reason to material problems. Any social relations which block the free application of reason are to be considered an evil not on moral but ontological grounds, as our very essence is compromised. Insofar as Marx's materialism is influenced by Epicurus, at the core of Marx's critique of bourgeois society lies an ontological, not an ethical, motive for the realization of freedom. Quite simply, reason is distinctly human and is required by human beings to satisfy material needs and create new possibilities. The capitalist accumulation of the products of labour is in

fact a conservative channeling of the ontological capacity of human beings to rationally create their own circumstances through the project of history. Concrete labour becomes subject to the demands of abstract labour and is no longer free.

2.3. Rationality and Abstraction

The result of labour is a necessary alienation of the human subject by the objectification of human capacities. This is a necessary alienation insofar as labour automatically entails the creation of new objective existences. Even the computer programmer creates something that is outside of their subjective being – the lines of code which structure his program have been created of his will, but there is nothing about them that relies on his continued existence or presence in order for the lines of code to continue existing on their own.

It is because the products of labour are objectifications separate from the producing subject that the possibility of accumulative appropriation exists. Appropriated labour is “merely a means to survival. Instead of being like itself, ‘the satisfaction of a need,’ labour becomes a means to life such that ‘life’ is expelled outside human self-production in practical activity” (Burkett, 2). In other words, the actual process of labour becomes removed from the process of the satisfaction of need, and instead becomes oriented to other goals which suit not the needs of the labourer, but the needs of he who appropriates the product.

This entire situation implies that there are preceding circumstances which force the subject to perform this labour, circumstances which would require a detailed historical analysis to fully explicate and which may be justly summed up as the separation of most of the population from the means of production, therefore creating objective circumstances in which the subject must sell their labour. It may be the case that the labourer’s self-perceived rationality for selling their labour is to earn a wage and that way meet their needs, but when we peer behind the veil of the *dramatis personae* and at the totality of the objective circumstances, we see that it is the capitalist who benefits from the appropriation of the surplus product. According to the definition of freedom which we have already laid, being the capacity to invest surplus to realize new

objective circumstances, the capitalist has agency at the cost of the labourer. Marx opens *Capital Volume I* with an analysis of the commodity, the objective form of appropriated labour, for this very reason.

In *Capital Volume I* Marx, referring to the commodity, writes,

If we make abstraction from its [the commodity's] use-value, we abstract also from the material constituents and forms which make it a use-value... With the disappearance of the useful character of the products of labour, the useful character of the kinds of labour embodied in them also disappears; this in turn entails the disappearance of the different concrete forms of labour. They can no longer be distinguished, but are all together reduced to the same kind of labour, human labour in the abstract (128).

This short passage is central to Marx's critique. First of all, it is important to point out that for Marx all labour, regardless of its social form, is oriented to the production of use-value. This makes sense taken in context of his ontology of labour, in which labour is applied to meet the needs of human beings. Therefore the product of labour must have some use, or use-value. But, if we make an abstraction from the production of use-value, if use-value is not the primary reason that something is produced, then the useful character of labour is itself abstracted or obscured.

This abstraction occurs when we are compelled to sell our labour in order to create exchange value. Exchange value is the valuation of commodities not according to their use-value, but their socially necessary labour time. To be sure, for anything to have an exchange value it must have a use-value; the commodity must have a purpose for it to be saleable. Nonetheless, the reason for the production of the commodity, when placed in the totality of capitalist social relations, is not according to the use-value of the commodity, which is itself conditioned by necessity arising from objective circumstances, but rather it is produced according to a rationality that is alien to the labourer and which

benefits the capitalist: exchange value. It is not that the products of reason are appropriated, but that the labourer is compelled to produce unreasonable products.⁴

The abstraction of exchange value is a real abstraction insofar as it is enacted through social relations. However, it is nonetheless an abstraction from the *totality* of human relations within nature insofar as the valuation of commodities is according to exchange value and not use-value. Therefore, “With the disappearance of the useful character of the products of labour, the useful character of the kinds of labour embodied in them also disappears” (Marx, 128). Because of this abstraction, the concrete forms of labour are reduced in the eyes of the capitalist to labour in the abstract. Labour becomes a function to which the human animal must conform.

We have come to a crucial point which must be understood in order to fully comprehend the irrational character of alienated labour. In drawing out the difference between the concrete forms of labour (the production of use-value) and human labour in the abstract, Marx is not simply referring to the abstract valuation of commodities according to socially necessary labour time, but is in fact pointing out the *a priori* distance between the objective circumstances which compel the capitalist to appropriate and apply surplus in particular ways, and the concrete circumstances of the people doing the actual producing. The capitalist operates from the standpoint of distribution, and therefore structures their behavior around exchange value and forces the labourer to do the same. In other words, because the labourer and capitalist have different needs according to their objective relationship with the means of production – including the self-created objective circumstances of production and the land and resources – and only one of them has control over surplus, only one is free to not just meet their needs but to invest that surplus to create new objective circumstances for themselves. The capitalist must ensure by all means that the labourer is not able to control surplus, lest they

⁴ Thus the possibility of crises of over-accumulation. The labourer produces not according to need, but to exchange value which is realized through a particular demand for a product. When the demand falls the production of that product does not automatically slow down, rather it must be corrected by an objective crisis of stagnation of the circulation of capital.

transcend the very situation which compels them to sell their labour, and the capitalist finds themselves out of the means to produce value of any sort.

We have a situation in capitalist society where the subject is primarily removed from the means of production, meaning that they must seek out an alien means in order to be productive and meet their needs. The subject is compelled, in order to meet the necessarily requirements of their own objective existence in the form of food, shelter, etc. to sell their labour. This is labour not to produce use-value determined by the objective circumstances of the labourer to directly fulfill their needs, but is a productive activity geared toward the creation of exchange value to the benefit of the capitalist. The capitalist benefits because they appropriate the products of labour. Because the capitalist controls the surplus they are able to invest it and change their objective circumstances. The laboring subject is entirely reliant on this process in order to ensure their continued objective existence. They have no agency over this process and so exist as mere objects, unable to realize their subjective being in the world as a being which is capable of applying reason to their objective circumstances and carrying out the material realization of that reason.

The objectification of the subject and the socialization of the commodity are real abstractions with consequences for consciousness. Marx explicates some consequences of the appearance of commodities in section four of the first chapter of *Capital*, "The Fetishism of the Commodity and Its Secret," in which he asserts that commodities are seen as social beings that act upon us, while we are seen as commodities through the abstraction of labour power. This is because the demands put on production by exchange value obscure the commodity's use-value and thus the concrete forms of labour behind it. Rather than recognize this hidden component to the commodity, the actors in the marketplace take the alien determinant of value, exchange value, to be that commodity's essence. In other words, one is only able to perceive the commodity in relation to oneself, a relation which is dictated by the alien logic of the commodity.

2.4. Imposed Abstractions as Barriers to Freedom

Marx begins *Capital*: “The *wealth* of societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails *appears* as an ‘immense collection of commodities’” [my italics] (Marx, *Capital Volume I* 125). What we see here could be read as a statement on the phenomenology of the commodity in contrast to the concrete totality of wealth, as statement on the apparent separation of the abstract appearance and the concrete reality of wealth.⁵ But this “appearance,” while having consequences for the consciousness of the subject in the form of commodity fetishism, in which immanent appearance is confused for being in its totality, is nonetheless a *real* appearance. That is, not only does the commodity form obscure use-value and the concrete labour behind it, but the real appearance of commodities reveals a real limit to wealth production in capitalism due to the constraints of the commodity form.

Burkett points out that the starting point of Marx’s analysis of society is the production of “wealth,” specifically defined as use-values (25). Burkett claims that the root of this definition of wealth is in Marx’s materialist ontology, with which we are already familiar: wealth is the result of the trans-historical capacity of human beings to create surplus through labour (Burkett 43). Human beings fulfill their needs and in doing so create new needs – all through the production of wealth, or use-values. The term “wealth” in the first sentence of *Capital* designates the entire array of the results of the appropriation of nature to the satisfaction of human needs.

John Holloway, in the unpublished essay mentioned in footnote 4, presents an even more profound interpretation of Marx’s use of the term “wealth” than does Burkett. First, Holloway points out that the word *Reichtum* is actually better translated as “richness” (2). Despite making it clear that his purpose is not to discover the “true” Marx, Holloway does refer to Marx’s definition of *Reichtum* in the *Grundrisse*:

⁵ The recognition of “wealth” as the starting point of *Capital*, not the commodity, I owe entirely to John Holloway. He presents his argument in a paper titled “*Read Capital: The First Sentence, Or, Capital starts with Wealth, not the Commodity*,” which is unpublished.

In fact, however, when the limited bourgeois form is stripped away [the commodity], what is wealth [*Reichtum*] other than the universality of human needs, capacities, pleasures, productive forces etc., created through universal exchange? The full development of human mastery over the forces of nature, those of so-called nature as well as of humanity's own nature? The absolute working-out of his creative potentialities, with no presupposition other than the previous historic development, which makes this totality of development, i.e. the development of all human powers as such the end in itself, not as measured on a predetermined yardstick? Where he does not produce himself in one specificity, but produces his totality? Strives not to remain something he has become, but is in the absolute movement of becoming? In bourgeois economics – and in the epoch of production to which it corresponds – this complete working-out of the human content appears as a complete emptying-out, this universal objectification as total alienation, and the tearing-down of all limited, one-sided aims as sacrifice of the human end-in-itself to an entirely external end (qtd. in Holloway 3).

According to Holloway, wealth is the *potential* richness of society (4) – the unfulfilled potential of human species-being. In other words, the potential of wealth transcends the limited social relations through which it is produced, and the appropriation of one being's productions for the sake of another being cuts off the process whereby the producer creates for herself her material conditions. Marx is pointing out an antagonism between wealth and the commodity, and the point that wealth is constrained by the commodity form suggests that within capitalism there is a limit to the development and expression of wealth, that wealth in its very nature demands emancipation in order to realize its transcendent capacity (Holloway, 4). For Holloway, wealth stands as the "unsatisfied subject," the result of a promise which has not yet been satisfied (5).

In capitalist society wealth, "...appears as an 'immense collection of commodities'." This appearance is also a real limit put on wealth, imposed on the basis of an abstraction from the transcendent possibilities of that wealth. In other words, in capitalist society the labourer as subject and commodity as object are abstracted, they are compelled by an alien logic. Furthermore, if we are to understand abstraction as a determination of a particular aspect and the negation of its totality, then concrete labour and its potential is made "less than." That is, the labourer becomes just that: a labourer. In the gaze of the alien rationale of the capitalist, which has as its vantage point the site of distribution, the site of profit, the subject is identified simply with the act of labour. Nothing of the subject is permitted to expend beyond this abstract determination, and the subject is therefore reduced to the being of an object. The commodity, labour, is reduced to an expression of exchange value, as opposed to its use within a totality of objective circumstances and subjective needs.

In capitalist society we have, on the level of abstractions which are made concrete, real barriers to first the realization of the possibilities of our objective circumstances. These barriers are the negation the subject's self-determination in order to control the labour process, as well as the abstraction of the commodity form from the totality of objective circumstances and the needs of human beings within those circumstances. We are faced, then, with a totalizing abstraction insofar as its rationale extends to both subjects and objects, an abstraction which, despite its totalizing drive, makes determinations that are inevitably less than the real, transcendent essence of subject and object. Simply, the world and we within it exist as far more than the expectations of capital, and the space of this distance is the site of contradictions which are at the heart of the degradation of nature.

The categories of this abstraction, enforced according to exchange value, extend *a priori* to material existence, beyond the immediate realm of production.⁶ That is, everything becomes quantifiable in relation to production and exchange.

⁶ The extension of the categories of "abstract" and "concrete" beyond labour and the commodity to the totality of natural existence is the direct result of a discussion with my good friends Ben Levy, an

2.5. One-Sidedness in *Debates on the Law on Thefts of Wood*

Marx's discussion of the "one-sidedness" of private property legislation in *Debates on the Law on Thefts of Wood* is useful to understand exactly how the free application of reason is hindered by abstract private property relations - and is especially useful in clearing up and confusion about the discrepancy between the abstract *form* of the state, law, custom, norms, practice, etc. and the material content or dimension of that society.

What is being discussed is the legislative categorization of the customary collection of dead wood from the private forests of landowners by the poor as "theft." Marx points out that as this law is in contradiction with material reality it is in fact a dishonest law, "...the legislator would have to draw up the following conclusion: It is because a box on the ear is not regarded as murder that it has become so frequent. It should be decreed therefore that a box on the ear is murder" (*First Supplement* par. 6). The analogy fits, however, unlike a strike to the ear, Marx does not consider the collection of dead wood to be an offence.

In order to understand this we must realize the nature of private property legislation in general as an abstraction from material reality to private ends. In recounting the legislative transition from feudal custom to modern right, Marx outlines the transition's inherent "one-sidedness." Because feudal property took the form of a hybrid between private and common, insofar as the use of property was dictated by custom, private property law because of its very nature must be "one-sided." This is simply because private property legislation takes as its starting point one aspect of property, while the social relations (customs) that operate with that property as its nucleus are in fact more complex than simple relations of ownership or rent (*Second Supplement* par. 4). Therefore, all those whose "right" is not sustained by the new legislation are excluded - and as modern legislation around property is focused on *private* property the state of existence for those forgotten is one of privation. Marx uses the example of the monastery: the poor had no "right" per se to receive support from the monastery, but it

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was custom for the monastery to provide such support. When the land of the monastery was converted into private land, while the church may have received financial compensation (as in the sale of private property), the poor are only worse off (*Second Supplement* par. 4).

Private property is therefore one-sided - it serves the needs of some and *de-*prives others even in the moment of *becoming* private. Therefore, Marx demands for the poor a “customary right” (*First Supplement* par. 34). This is a seemingly contradictory term, for elsewhere in the discussion Marx points out that the role of right is in fact to ensure that custom does not contradict what is just (hence the French Revolution fought for Right against the Customs of the aristocracy). What Marx is calling for is to put into right what has until that time only been an informal custom for the poor - that which has been forgotten in the one-sided abstraction of private property laws from the more complex social relations that take property as its locus. Customary right, then, would transcend the one-sidedness of private property insofar as it would prevent the narrow interest of the property holder from infringing on the customary practices of the poor which the poor in fact require to maintain their existence.

At the centre of this argument is the notion of “one-sidedness.” We see in the operation of “one-sidedness,” in the transformation of hybrid properties into private properties, the essential abstraction of capital. The one-sided abstraction of private property, abstract because it is rationalized apart from a larger whole and one-sided because it suits the interests of some and not others, puts unreasonable demands on the material reality of that “property.” On the side of abstraction, we see the right of the land-owner, who has paid for the land and now is free to do with it as he pleases - but before this abstraction there was the concrete reality of the social relations organized around that property, which the landowner now arbitrarily seeks to criminalize as “theft” of wood.

The absurdity of the one-sided abstraction of private property is highlighted even further when we remember that custom of collecting dead wood is a rational means of meeting the demands of one’s needs within particular circumstances. The collection of dead wood is the poor family’s only recourse, as they themselves lack a right to access

trees. The criminalization of the collection of dead wood represents more than just unjust immiseration, but is in fact unjust insofar as it makes a crime of rational activity - rational activity which is in fact necessary if the poor are not to freeze.

The abstraction of private property as a form, and alienated abstraction in general, puts a demand on its material content, including social relations. This content exists before the demand as more than the abstraction made of it, but after this demand the material reality is expected to conform. In concrete reality the social relations surrounding the monastery are much more than an abstract conception of the monastery grounds as "private property," which necessarily excludes all social relations which are contrary to the right to withhold access to that property. Thus in the privatization of the monastery grounds the poor are excluded, and their freedom to apply reason to meet their needs is denied - in effect the very process by which the poor enact their humanness in this sense is denied when private property is universalized. In the case of the wood collector it is even criminalized.⁷

Human beings are beings *within* and *as* nature. We are beings *as* nature because we cannot escape our objective existence without denying our being as humans; we have an objective form which must be maintained. We are beings *within* nature because our fundamental, subjective capacity to produce in order to ensure our existence is conditioned by natural possibilities and limits. Our needs are determined by our material conditions, yet it is our ability to apply reason in a material capacity, in order to potentially transcend these needs, which sets us apart from animals. Through shaping the material world in order to satisfy needs, human beings change their material circumstances, and thus create for themselves new needs. History, then, is to be

⁷ For example, in Vancouver it is illegal to pitch a makeshift shelter. The homeless are not only refused property, but are refused property on the grounds that to do otherwise creates an eyesore in the park. Worst of all it permits them some sort of stability whereby they might make other selfish demands! Indeed when human beings are able to satisfy one need the another need may be addressed, and the greatest threat to a municipal government controlled by the real-estate market is a population of poor which have gained the stable platform in the shape of a roof over their heads with which to develop a politics of resistance.

understood as the sequence of productive social relations and material conditions, or technology, as needs are transcended and new needs arise, creating contradictions between the objective circumstances of society and subjective needs and desires. It must be stressed here that this is not a mechanistic process - at the centre of this process is the human subject who fundamentally has the capacity to apply reason.

Labour, the ability to appropriate nature and fashion it according to the demands of necessity, is at the centre of history and human becoming. Thus, to appropriate the products of labour is to appropriate the means by which need is satisfied and to alienate the activity of labour from its foundation in necessity and human self-creation. In other words, appropriated labour is alienated from a rationality of self-determination. Instead, labour is compelled by the rationality not of use-value, which is determined by the material circumstances of human beings, but by exchange value. This one-sided determination is an abstraction that obscures use-value and the concrete labour which produces it. In doing so, the labourer too is abstracted and is reduced in society to an objective source of labour power.

Chapter 3. Repressive needs and Inner Freedom in *One-Dimensional Man*

For Marcuse, repressive needs prevent the development of “inner freedom” (Marcuse, 10). To argue this statement I will first explain what repressive needs are in the context of Marcuse’s understanding of needs in general. Next, I will explain what Marcuse means by socially necessary labour. Finally, I will explain that creation of repressive needs is socially necessary labour because repressive needs prevent the development of what Marcuse calls “inner freedom.”

For Marcuse, there is a tension between the needs of individuals and the needs of society. Marcuse writes, “The creation of repressive needs has long since become part of socially necessary labor - necessary in the sense that without it, the established mode of production could not be sustained” (*One-Dimensional Man*, 246). Individuals of course do not live in a historical vacuum, and the chances of the satisfaction of individual needs have always been determined by the “prevailing societal institutions and interests” (Marcuse, 4). In other words, there have always been dominant powers in society that have put general demands on individuals and groups in order to satisfy particular interests, and individuals tend to act as if those interests were their own. The individual is forced to deny particular needs for the sake of the continuation of these institutions and interests (Marcuse, 2, 3). Labour, for example, demands the renunciation of immediate gratification. Furthermore, individuals tend to act as if those interests were their own. In order to exist in a given society not only does the individual have to deny some needs, but they must internalize social needs. By “social needs” I intend specifically those requirements imposed by the dominant institutions and interests upon activity, and which uphold the status quo. The individual learns what is expected of them by the institutions and interests of their society, and they identify with these interests insofar as their satisfaction suits some needs of the individual. Insofar as submission grants access to subsistence, the sacrifice of some needs for the gratification of others seems reasonable. In advanced industrial society, specifically, the individual identifies

with the expectations superimposed upon them insofar as their submission is rewarded by an ever increasing quality of life.

According to Marcuse, freedom from want is the “concrete substance of all freedom” (1). However, the prevailing societal institutions and interests are oriented otherwise; Marcuse sees their interest as lying in the maintenance of domination. He writes, “the requirements of mass production are not necessarily that of human beings” (Marcuse, 244). The requirements of mass production are determined by the dominant institutions and interests, and insofar as mass production is not oriented toward the freedom from want there is an antagonism between individual needs and social needs. Repressive needs are those which are superimposed by the productive apparatus under conditions of unfreedom. Conditioned by this state of unfreedom, the individual is forced to pursue ends that are not their own, despite the possibility of liberation.

Marcuse sees the creation of repressive needs as labour that is socially necessary. “Socially necessary labour” simply means the ways in which life must be arranged and prefigured, the ways in which human energy must be compelled or coerced, in order to satisfy whatever the social needs are. Ultimately, socially necessary labour is necessary because without it the technological apparatus, the foundation of the dominant institutions and interests, could not be maintained.

However, Marcuse is not just interested in labour in the colloquial sense of employment. Usually when we think of labour we think of work in terms of earning a wage or the type of labour involved in maintaining a family or household, or even labour in terms of time spent outside work recuperating and reviving one’s body and mind for the return to work. In short, we think of labour as those functions which support one’s material existence. For instance, in a capitalist economy, labour is socially necessary because production would not happen without it - at least not in a way conducive to the appropriation and concentration of wealth. Because the dominant interests are oriented toward a certain end (the mass production of wealth on an ever greater scale), labour, insofar as it is a function crucial to the realization of this end, is socially necessary.

In *One-Dimensional Man* Marcuse is more concerned with consciousness than economy, and he understands the creation of repressive needs to be a form of socially

necessary labour. Therefore, we must understand his statement as not just regarding one type or function of labour among others, but in terms of its product, repressive needs, and that product's effect on consciousness. While the creation of the material component of these needs, the massive quantities of goods and services including the culture industries, is achieved by labour, we can only understand why the creation of repressive needs is socially necessary if we understand what it achieves.

In order to understand why the creation of repressive needs is socially necessary we must know how it is that repressive needs uphold contemporary society. There are obvious examples of that which is socially necessary for the prevailing institutions and interests. Take, for example, the massive financial institutions which utilize debt on a global scale as the basis of a functioning economy, debt which itself makes necessary the availability of employment and the structuring of daily life around the function of labour. Marcuse finds these types of economic examples to be troubling insofar as the reproduction and satisfaction of such needs is the basis of economic domination. However, regardless of economic concerns, when Marcuse talks about needs he is talking about all the ways in which we live our lives. He is concerned not just with labour, but leisure, not just with obvious economic exploitation, but enjoyment. Needs are the way in which people project beyond their immediate circumstances to what they wish to achieve. It is according to needs that people structure their activity.

Marcuse states that without the creation of *repressive* needs, "the established mode of production could not be sustained" (246). If the mode of production in the economic or technological sense includes such socially necessary forms of activity such as labour, administration, the organization of space to suit the needs of a steady flow of business, and other forms of activity and organization which uphold the mode of production, then we must consider that he is saying that repressive needs also uphold the mode of production. Repressive needs make necessary a personal investment in the mode of production in the sense that the ways in which individuals who have internalized repressive needs wish to live their lives necessitates submission to social needs.

Marcuse writes, "We may distinguish both true and false needs. "False" are those which are superimposed upon the individual by particular social interests in his

repression: the needs which perpetuate toil, aggressiveness, misery, and injustice” (5). Marcuse explains that these false needs, despite being superimposed, are internalized by the individual. That is, they are *needs*, and the individual experiences them as such, as something personal in which they are invested and upon the satisfaction of which they depend. Conversely, there is nothing inherent in the necessary function of labour that promotes identification with the system. The developing working class of the 19th century had an antagonistic relationship with the mode of production. Labour was undesirable, even detrimental to the labourer’s life. They recognized that the apparatus undermined to their true needs and were occasionally driven to revolt.

Marcuse is concerned with the fact that today the majority of individuals actually identify with the system even though it keeps them in a state of unfreedom. “But in the contemporary period, the technological controls appear to be the very embodiment of Reason for the benefit of all social groups and interests - to such an extent that all contradiction seems irrational and all counteraction impossible” (Marcuse, 9). That is, despite the prevailing irrationality and unfreedom of society, individuals are fully invested in the needs of society as if they were their own. Indeed, it is precisely because social needs have become the individual’s own that contradiction and counteraction seems irrational and impossible - because to act against the system would be to act against the means of satisfying those very needs!

Marcuse calls these superimposed needs “false needs” (5). Despite their rational appearance, and no matter how invested, how free the individual may think they are, these needs retain their falsity. They are false because they are superimposed on the individual by the requirements of the apparatus, and, insofar as they are internalized by the individual and believed to be their own, they arrest the potential to perceive the overwhelming irrational character of society. This society is irrational because, by superimposing false needs, it keeps the possibility of freedom, in terms of the development of a society committed to permanent freedom from want, from being realized.

For the individual to internalize needs which are in fact contrary to the individual’s freedom, they must believe this sacrifice to be rational. In contemporary industrial

society, capable of producing massive quantities of wealth, it is the conquest of scarcity which “spreads a repressive productivity and “false needs”” (Marcuse, 241). That is, it is the sheer quantity of goods and services available in this society that encourages identification with social needs. These goods and services may not be immediately available for appropriation by whomever, whenever necessary, but it is enough that the individual knows the only way to access this wealth is by submission to the apparatus. They submit because what the system has to offer is simply too much to resist, and, regardless, the individual knows no alternative. No other society has ever produced so much wealth, and this particular achievement obscures the irrationality of the whole. The individual rationalizes the negative features of the mode of production as simple, inevitable by-products of the creation of a better and better lifestyle (Marcuse, 225). Unfreedom is itself rationalized as having no use value, as only conformity grants access to this wealth.

However, it is not the case that the individual exists as an independent power that freely chooses to participate in production and consumption. Rather, the individual is completely invested, physically and mentally, in production and consumption - they rely upon it entirely. As a result, their consciousness is unable to achieve the critical distance required to observe society’s irrational limits. On this Marcuse writes, “the subject which is alienated is swallowed up by its alienated existence” (11). Alienation is the state in which the objects that constitute one’s world are experienced as having a power over and above the individuals in that world. This implies consciousness of the tension between oneself and the world. But the subject in contemporary society is swallowed up by its alienated existence; alienation comes to be the *de facto* mode of existence. Submission to the overwhelming rational organization of the system of production and distribution is accepted as rational and advantageous. Therefore, the vast quantitative aspect of social wealth also has a qualitative aspect. Production, distribution, and consumption overwhelm all aspects of life from labour to leisure. Even the most private, intimate moments are enveloped by a world of commodities and services. Not only are we alienated from society and its mode of production, we are overwhelmed by its wealth and the rationality of unfreedom, and we enjoy our subservience. The totalitarian aspect of the society reveals itself in the fact that its products, services, demands and

proscribed desires are always with us. It provides no exit, and one cannot even imagine that there are walls.

The totally overwhelming presence of the society and mode of production in our daily lives illuminates a contradiction between contemporary society and freedom. Marcuse asks us, "Can a society which is incapable of protecting individual privacy even within one's four walls rightfully claim that it respects the individual and that it is a free society?" (245). We may believe ourselves to be free when we live within the seemingly rational dictates of industrial society, totally immersed and invested in the predetermined paths laid out for us, but as soon as we attempt a retreat from society we notice that the society structures every moment of our lives. It is the backdrop which conditions all activities. We are entirely dependent on the apparatus and any retreat is always conditioned by the overwhelming presence of society and its demand to produce and consume - there can be no peace of body and mind except for the very rich. It is precisely because the society does not respect the individual, that daily life is conditioned by the pursuit of false needs which keep the individual from realizing their potential, that we are not free. Freedom would mean freedom *from* the society (Marcuse, 4), but this negative freedom is absolutely unbearable for the institutions that demand productivity in exchange for existence. So long as we are unnecessarily forced to perpetually chase satisfaction of our vital needs through involvement and investment in the apparatus, despite the growing possibility of permanently pacifying the struggle for existence, we cannot be free as individuals.

It is precisely the elimination of the possibility of the private, autonomous individual, through the creation and internalization of false needs, which is socially necessary. This is because without the internalization of false needs individuals might recognize the irrational character of contemporary society and be driven to reject it. The private, autonomous individual is crucial to liberation because "the attainment of autonomy demands conditions in which the repressed dimensions of experience can come to life again; their liberation demands the repression of the heteronomous needs and satisfactions which organize life in this society" (Marcuse, 245). The heteronomous needs and satisfactions which organize life in this society are of course those needs,

desires, and liberties which are superimposed upon the individual and which she identifies with. They are the false needs around which we construct our lives.

The heteronomous false needs, satisfactions and demands that are superimposed on the individual are contrary to the development of what Marcuse calls "inner freedom," that "private space in which man may become and remain "himself"" (10). The heteronomous ways in which we organize our lives and the internalization of social needs are contrary and antagonistic to that private, inner freedom in which the autonomous, critical individual develops. If the individual is wrapped up in public existence, completely overwhelmed by false needs which are the same as everybody else's and which work to perpetuate an irrational society that keeps the individual in a state of complete mobilization despite the possibility of liberation, in a state of complete satisfaction despite her unfreedom, she will not develop needs that are autonomous from, let alone antagonistic to, totalitarian society. Autonomy from the society demands repression of false needs - the individual must be confronted with themselves, with the pervasive unhappiness, with the "fear, frustration and disgust" lying just below the "thin surface" of satisfaction (Marcuse, 76). Caught up in a cycle of petty gratifications and unconscious investment, that fear, frustration, and disgust that Marcuse believes to be so pervasive will never be acknowledged. That which is unacknowledged and made invisible simply cannot develop into a revolutionary force. Individuals must confront that inner dimension in order to recognize, through reflection, the true conditions of their existence. It is by superimposing false needs and satisfactions which perpetuate the denial of this inner dimension that the society "denies freedom at its hidden roots" (Marcuse, 245).

The creation of false needs is socially necessary because they keep individuals from recognizing their true needs. The realization of the individual's true needs would make them notice the irrationality of society, which is antagonistic to those needs. "Deprived of his false fathers, leaders, friends, and representatives, he [the individual in contemporary society] would have to learn his ABC's again. But the words and sentences which he would form might come out very differently, and so might his aspirations and fears" (Marcuse, 246). That is, deprived of the ways in which we invest ourselves in society, the false needs which we believe to be freely chosen under

conditions of unfreedom, the infantile desires and pastimes and the industries of distraction, the individual would enter into a different relationship with themselves. This relationship would not be one of total involvement in and identification with the society, but one of reflection upon oneself and the society - it would be characterized by the development of a critical distance. The individual would be thrown back upon themselves, left to the thoughts and desires that were repressed in the pursuit of false needs. They would be forced to rethink the meaning of their lives and the ways in which they organize their activity.

It is only through the destruction of the possibility of introspection by the creation of repressive needs that individuals can identify so strongly with the mode of production. The development of this inner space is necessarily intimate and individual. Heteronomous needs squeeze out any semblance of individual needs and desires separate from the conforming masses. The needs that would develop if the individual experienced some privacy from society might be antagonistic to those heteronomous false needs and the system that they support. The individual who reflects upon themselves might recognize misery under the thin veil of happiness and be less willing to tolerate the system, less quick to rationalize unfreedom. The creation of repressive needs is socially necessary because they keep this consciousness from developing, therefore keeping people happy, productive, and totally unfree.

Advanced industrial society has achieved great wealth and beat back the conditions in which nature stands as an obstacle to our existence. However, in the process we have established a society that demands total mobilization and investment in the productive apparatus despite having the wealth available to pacify vital needs. Individuals are kept in a web of hour by hour desire. Constantly seeking distractions among a cornucopia of wealth, the individual is unable to look beyond their own immediate horizon to the irrational limits of the society, nor are they able to develop an inner dialogue autonomous from their false needs and distractions. Marcuse writes, "All liberation depends on the consciousness of servitude, and the emergence of this consciousness is always hampered by the predominance of needs and satisfactions which, to a great extent, have become the individual's own" (7). When individuals believe themselves to have freely chosen that which has been laid out for them, when they rest

content in childish pleasures and animal satisfactions, when they participate uncritically, identify with their cage, and savour the scraps provided, not only do they unconsciously reproduce the system that dominates them, but they are kept from developing an inner dialogue in which they might realize that their fears, needs, and desires are quite different than what they thought them to be. Consciousness of servitude is the antithesis of identification with it, and contemporary society relies on the prevalence of false needs and their temporary gratification to keep people in servitude to and personal involvement with the mode of production.

Chapter 4. Transcendence and Rebellious Subjectivity in *The Aesthetic Dimension*

In *The Aesthetic Dimension*, Marcuse argues that experiencing art interrupts unreflective involvement in the world of appearances, infecting experience with awareness of an inner dimension that is suppressed and distorted by those appearances. To demonstrate this point I will first explain what Marcuse means by “immediate reality” and how it is constituted by “the reified objectivity of established social relations” (7). Next, I will explain how art, through an “aesthetic sublimation,” achieves transcendence of immediate reality before showing how the transcendence of immediate reality results in an “aesthetic desublimation,” or the realization of the repressive nature of reality. Finally, I will show that aesthetic desublimation opens a “new” dimension of experience which Marcuse calls “rebirth of the rebellious subjectivity” (7).

In the statement which is the object of investigation in this essay Marcuse splits reality into different aspects or gradations of experience. Marcuse writes, “The transcendence of *immediate reality* shatters the reified objectivity of established social relations and opens a new dimension of experience: rebirth of the rebellious subjectivity”[my italics] (7). Marcuse’s use of the word “immediate” to condition the word “reality” tells us that for Marcuse there are different aspects of reality, or different dimensions of experience, that may or may not be consciously acknowledged.

The first dimension of experience that Marcuse is clearly pointing to in the sentence above is “immediate reality.” The other is the “new dimension” opened up by the transcendence of immediate reality. For Marcuse, it is the work of art which transcends immediate reality, opening up the new dimension. While the object of the sentence is “transcendence,” and it is the act of transcendence which leads to consciousness of the new dimension, the nature of “transcendence” is that it transcends something. Therefore, we must understand what is being transcended, in this case

“immediate reality,” if we are to understand what Marcuse means by transcendence and how it opens up a new dimension of experience.

What Marcuse means by “immediate reality” is the world of appearances. Immediate reality is that aspect of experience that is immediately available to consciousness. It is the unreflected upon world of sensuousness and daily activity by which we are always surrounded and in which we are usually involved.

The immediate really is “immediate,” and therefore unreflective involvement in immediate reality excludes that which is not immediate, that which has been or could be. Immediate reality has the temporal quality of being “now” to the exclusion of “was” or “will.” Immediate reality is always in a state of appearing as it appears to be, and consciousness cannot, when equipped with nothing but appearance, go beyond the apparent immediate reality to comprehend the nature of their involvement in it. The consciousness of appearance as something distinct, as opposed to history or possibility, demands consciousness of something other than what is apparent, and it is exactly this “other” which is denied by the immediacy of immediate reality.

Usually in daily life we are totally involved in immediate reality. We act at work as though we are the barista in the cafe, at the store as if we are the consumer. Especially in contemporary society, our lives are constituted by one series of performances after another, adapted according to social expectations and the immediate requirements of the situation in a world of objects beyond our control. We are enveloped by the organization of our surroundings and, for the most part, this experience, in its overwhelming immediacy, appears wholly rational. Reality just appears to us and we respond to it from a stock of internalized norms and values. We simply respond to and engage in immediate reality in the ways that seem most appropriate.

While immediate reality has the appearance of being “now” to the exclusion of other temporal dimensions, the world itself is historical. It is the historical world in which we are born and die, in which the constant struggle between nature and society is carried out, and which is the hidden backdrop behind immediate experience. As the world itself is historical, then this historical dimension lies behind and is constitutive of immediate reality, although it is not immediately available in the appearance of

immediate reality. Immediate reality cannot exist independently of everything else that is, was, or could be, despite its appearance. That is, immediate reality is not only appearance, but appearance is all that is *immediately* available to unreflective experience.

Marcuse points to the historical nature of the world when he states that “it is the *reified objectivity* of established social relations” [my italics] which is shattered by the “transcendence of immediate reality” (7). In anticipation of the explanation of “transcendence” later in this essay, we can see that Marcuse has already given us a clue to its meaning when he uses the word “reified” to designate what is shattered by the transcendence embodied by the work of art. Furthermore, “reified objectivity” designates a particular character of social relations, a particular way that they appear to consciousness.

Reified means objectified or thing-ified. For the purpose of this essay we can think of that which is reified as have a quality of *apparent* stasis, permanence, and unchangeability. Quoting Horkheimer and Adorno, Marcuse writes, “All reification is a forgetting” (73). That is, the reified appearance of the world is contrary to the real historical nature of the world because reification presents the world as static, permanent, and unchangeable in contrast to the world’s historical nature, which involves fluctuation, temporality, and changeability.

Marcuse is saying that “established social relations” are reified and therefore have the appearance of immutability. Reified social relations appear not even as things once established that are now permanent, but as the way social relations are in their very nature. They appear to follow immutable laws. Take for example the neoliberal catechism that all human beings are fundamentally motivated by greed, remembering that reification excludes consciousness of the historical nature of social relations as well as the historical role that those relations play. In the case of the neoliberal catechism what is excluded is the historical awareness that we live in a society that exploits the majority of the population, subjecting them to a constant state of need, in order to amass capital which is again turned around to reproduce capitalist society on an enlarged, more destructive, and more exploitative scale, therefore reproducing the conditions which

motivate “greed.” There is no inherent greed to human nature, only a society which establishes conditions that encourage acts of desperation and exploitation.

Furthermore, Marcuse is suggesting that immediate reality is intimately tied up with reified social relations, as it is the transcendence of immediate reality which “shatters the reified objectivity of established social relations” (7). Marcuse writes, for example, “The truth of art lies in its power to break the monopoly of established reality (i.e., of those who established it) to *define* what is *real*” (9), and he also refers to the “functional existence and performance in society” (9) of individuals, pointing on the first hand to the illusory definition of what is real in established reality, and on the other hand to the functional existence and performance, the reification, of individuals and social relations in established reality. For Marcuse, the immediate reality, the experience of the apparent “now,” is constituted by “the reified objectivity of established social relations,” giving immediate reality the appearance of permanence, rationality, and immutability. That is, the historical background to immediate reality is hidden from experience by the apparent stasis and functionality of the world. Reification presents the world around us as constituted by certain objects and relations with particular dynamics and laws in which we engage and react. To consciousness these things just “are,” and the historical backdrop from which they arise is obscured by their apparent permanence.

When we are completely involved in the reified objectivity of established social relations which is constitutive of immediate reality it cannot be said that we are autonomous. Marcuse writes, “Forgetting past suffering and past joy alleviates life under a repressive reality principle” (73). Autonomy requires that we are aware of the conditions in which we act, but in immediate reality our behaviour is structured by reified social relations which obscure the historical nature of the world and our experience, therefore rectifying to consciousness a repressive world. We act and react within the imposed rules and structures because, for the most part, we do not reflect on immediate reality and have forgotten what has passed. To the unreflective individual the *reified* reality *is* the world in which they live, it is the whole world, and they are unaware that their experience and thoughts are structured by illusions, that there might be some truth beyond their experience of the world. Autonomy under such conditions is not possible. Even leisure is conditioned by reified social relations in the form of the eventual return to

work and appropriate, shared, and available forms of leisure. Within the experience of immediate reality we live purely reactionary lives, responding to what is imposed and required according to the apparently unchanging principles which structure society. However, this ahistorical, static quality of immediate reality and experience is what is shattered by the transcendence of immediate reality, encouraging a critical awareness of one's self and the world.

Immediate reality is that realm of experience in which we are unreflectively involved. But Marcuse believes that art has the power to transcend immediate reality, shatter "reified objectivity," and open a space for critical reflection on the world and ourselves. Because reified objectivity has a politically conservative quality of preserving in consciousness the status quo, art, by shattering reified objectivity, can be said to have a political quality as well. For Marcuse it is the aesthetic form, art itself, which is political (ix). That is, we cannot point to a specific type of art within other types and say that this is art of a political nature, while elsewhere we can find art of another nature. For Marcuse, all art is political not because of its specific content, or what the art is about, but the way in which the content is transformed by the aesthetic form itself. The "content" of the work of art is that in immediate reality which is communicated but also transformed by the aesthetic form. The transformation of the content shatters the reified quality of immediate reality, establishing the work's legitimacy as "art." Therefore, only those works which achieve the aesthetic form may be called art.

Not every act of creation, according to Marcuse, can be called art. Art must achieve more than just technical mastery or superior representation or expression, it must have a particular form. Marcuse defines aesthetic form as "the result of the transformation of a given content (actual or historical, personal or social fact) into a self-contained whole: a poem, play, novel, etc." (8). Art must of course communicate some sort of actual, historical, personal, or social fact. If it did not, then there would be no communication at all (Marcuse, 41). However, while art represents the immediate reality in order to communicate, art is not bound by the laws of the reified social relations which structure that immediate reality. Rather, this content is "taken out" (8) of the socially determined world and given an existence and meaning of its own in relation to the self-

contained whole of the work of art. This is achieved through stylization and the way that the work refers to itself for its meaning. Marcuse writes,

“...in the work this “stuff” [immediate reality], divested of its immediacy, becomes something qualitatively different, part of another reality. Even where a fragment of reality is left untransformed (for example, quoted phrases from a speech by Robespierre) the content is changed by the work as a whole; its meaning can even be turned into its opposite” (42).

That is, the component parts of the work get their meaning not from the world or immediate reality, but from the way that the world is communicated in the work of art. Marcuse calls this communication and transformation of immediate reality “sublimation,” (7) and sublimation is what is achieved by the aesthetic form. Through this sublimation art is autonomous from reality.

It is not that the experiences and meanings of the artwork do not exist or are somehow less true than the “objective” reality which is transformed and communicated by the artwork. Rather, these experiences and meanings “shatter the reified objectivity of established social relations” (7) and expose themselves as more than the world of appearance (Marcuse, 54). Experiences and objects, people and events are taken out of their thing-ified being. The boundaries imposed by reified social relations on that which is and that which is not, on possibility itself, are smashed. The artwork’s existence and meaning are not determined by the reified objectivity of established social relations, and by that very virtue they transcend immediate reality. By “transcend” I mean the artwork goes beyond the limits of immediate reality. The fact that there is more to experience and the objects of experience than the unreflective experience of immediate reality is exposed by the sublimative transcendence of the artistic form. Furthermore, because art transcends it necessarily reveals the limits of that which it transcends.

By virtue of the aesthetic form and its sublimation of the given reality, the artwork shows the world as permeated with subjectivity, otherwise hidden and repressed in daily life. Marcuse writes, “The encounter with the truth of art happens in the estranging language and images which make perceptible, visible, and audible that which is no

longer, or not yet, perceived, said, and heard in everyday life" (72). To be sure, reified social relations do exist, but their appearance as reified is an illusion and entails the suppression of subjectivity, memory, and autonomy in order to maintain the illusion. The reified objectivity of immediate reality is maintained for the sake of order and control, but art reveals this reality to be permeated with subjectivity and difference, of that which in its existence transcends the reified conceptions of what is real and therefore exposes the repressive quality of life in this society.

The reified world is only a part of what is real; it is the world of appearances. The world is far more complex than democracy, market relations, or patriarchy. Its objects cannot be reduced in their very existence to the static, operational being that reification presents as an image. In other words, the real essence of things is antagonistic to the reified appearance. Reification suppresses historical awareness, but it substitutes historical awareness only for an image - it does not displace history itself. The representation in art of the real being behind the appearance transcends the boundaries of reification by exposing it as merely an image. "With the affirmation of the inwardness of subjectivity, the individual steps out of the network of exchange relationships and exchange values, withdraws from the reality of bourgeois society, and enters another dimension of existence" (Marcuse, 4). In other words the affirmation of subjectivity is antagonistic to mere appearances and allows the subject to step out of identification with immediate reality, encouraging a critical awareness of the world and experience. The subject, too, is real, and acknowledgement of the complexity of subjective experience reveals the ways in which the subject is forced to be other than free in society.

Because art exposes different aspects of reality that are excluded and misrepresented in the immediate reality, art necessarily opposes the immediate reality. Marcuse writes, "... the world formed by art is recognized as a reality which is suppressed and distorted in the given reality. This experience [of the world formed by art] culminates in extreme situations... which explode the given reality in the name of a truth normally denied or even unheard" (6). Art violates the boundaries put on experience and the objects of experience, and thereby shatters their reified appearance given by immediate reality, revealing them as something historical, created, and changeable.

Marcuse refers to the opposition to immediate reality as an aesthetic desublimation. He writes, "... on the basis of aesthetic sublimation, a *desublimation* takes place in the perception of individuals - in their feelings, judgements, thoughts; an invalidation of dominant norms, needs, and values" (Marcuse, 7). That is, the sublimative transformation of the world releases experience from the constraints of the world, and those aspects of experience which were previously invisible, unexpressed, or suppressed are acknowledged and given room for expression. Because of the contrast between the world represented in art and reality, reality is revealed in its repressive nature. By refusing to reduce its expression to mere copy of immediate reality, and instead exposing the limits of immediate reality, art thrusts into the awareness of individuals the repressive nature of immediate reality (Marcuse, 51). By recalling, for example, the unacknowledged discontents of the individual art removes them from the order which rationalizes or represses them as subjective in contrast to the "real" objective situation and gives them meaning and force in their own right.

In restructuring our awareness of the world and ourselves, art challenges the monopoly of the established reality to determine what is "real" (Marcuse, 9). Art creates a fictitious world which is nevertheless "more real than reality itself" (Marcuse, 22). That is, art liberates subjectivity from unconscious reactive existence in immediate reality by revealing immediate reality as reified, and by acknowledging as real those aspects of subjectivity which have been suppressed or rationalized as unreal. This is why Marcuse says that the transcendence of art open a "new" dimension. Art represents aspects of reality hitherto unacknowledged and makes them communicable and available to consciousness in a way that is antagonistic to unreflective involvement in the world. Marcuse writes, "the encounter with the fictitious world restructures consciousness and gives sensual representation to a counter-societal experience" (44). The transformation of reality, the injection of the subjective element, forces upon individuals a reflective view on reality and legitimizes this reflective awareness of reality not as something foolish or "out of touch" but as real and repressed in immediate reality.

Marcuse states that the opening of the new dimension of experience is synonymous with the "rebirth of the rebellious subjectivity" (7). By virtue of the aesthetic form, "Subject and objects encounter the appearance of that autonomy which is denied

them in their society” (Marcuse, 72). That is, by revealing the possibility of freedom, art instills individuals with the need to create a new social order, one which respects the autonomy of people and things. The individual, with their new consciousness of this dimension, is faced with a choice: acknowledge the fact that the world as it is has a repressive quality, that individuals and things are forced by society to have a repressed existence, or engage in self-deception.

It is not that art creates or instills in the individual an inner dimension. It was always there, but dormant, unacknowledged, unconscious of itself and even rationalized as irrational “subjectivity.” In other words, it was repressed by the unreflective involvement encouraged by the reified objectivity of immediate reality. When we are purely involved in the world of appearances we are unaware of the ways which we are behaving and thinking. This is not to say that we are unconscious, but that we are not self-conscious in a way that allows for reflection on possibilities of different ways of thinking and acting. However, art creates a distance between individuals and immediate reality by mediating immediate reality, allowing the individual to take a step back from being fully involved in immediate reality and instead reflect on the mediated reality in the artwork.

We may now comprehend the gravity of the quote which in the beginning of this essay I stated to be the object of investigation. For Marcuse, “The transcendence of immediate reality shatters the reified objectivity of established social relations and opens a new dimension of experience: rebirth of the rebellious subjectivity” (7). Art acknowledges not only the immediate reality, but it acknowledges that which is not immediate: the subjective and historical aspects of reality which are repressed by unreflective involvement in the world of appearances. By virtue of the distance from immediate reality created in the work of art, the experience of art interrupts unreflective involvement in the world of appearances, infecting experience with consciousness of an inner dimension that is suppressed and distorted by those appearances and calling to attention the need for liberation. Art shatters that which is reified by revealing that which is obscured by immediate reality, exposing the reified world as an illusion. This is because the revealed subjective and historical aspects of reality are inherently antagonistic to the illusion of stasis and permanence. Therefore, art preserves in

memory the possibility of existing in ways other than those prescribed by the dominant social order. Art reveals the possibility of freedom itself.

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